A HOME AWAY FROM HOME:  
THE PROLIFERATION OF THE CELESTIAL 
CHURCH OF CHRIST (CCC) IN DIASPORA - EUROPE

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The phenomenon of African new religious movements (NRM) in 20th century Europe has been visited with remarkable neglect by contemporary historians and sociologists of religion. While the burgeoning new religious movements which characterizes the European religious scene has often caught the gaze of religious scientists, very little research has been done on the African new religious initiatives such as the ‘indigenous churches’ which have found the European soil as new homes and alternative mission fields in the last four decades. Works of such scholars like Hill, Gerloff and Ter Haar are worthy of mention here. Others who had treated the expansive subject of new religious movements in the European context have either simply noted them (African NRMs) in the passing, completely ignores them or consciously excludes them from the umbrella. Hill has noted earlier that:

English Christians have for many years been used to an annual diet of depressing statistics in relation to declining church membership, dwindling congregations ... the gloomy picture of more churches closing. While English church leaders have been vainly trying to rally support to prop up the tottering foundations of traditional white christianity, a quiet revolution has been taking place among Britain’s black Christians in the unfashionable back streets of our towns and cities.

In our view, this observation is largely true of black Christians in other European countries such as Germany.

2 Clifford, Hill, Black Churches, 3.
Using Britain and Germany as case studies, this preliminary study is set to examine the nascence, development and the proliferation rate of the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) in diaspora. It will investigate into what factors facilitated the re-packaging and transmission of African Christianity to what hitherto was the home of mission Christianity. CCC has no doubt transcended social and geo-cultural contexts within its fifty-years (golden) historical epoch. The study attempts to see whether, how and to what extent CCC has been able to display tenacity in its essential cultural identity and worldview while also ‘reaching out for souls’ (converts) in a highly multi-racial and religio-cultural context such as Europe.

**Brief History of CCC**

CCC represents one of the most popular and pervasive charismatic religious collectivity in West Africa. It falls under the genus of religious phenomena referred in Nigeria as Aladura churches, a conventional name coined to express their penchant and proclivity for prayer, healing, prophecy and other charismatic activities. CCC emerged spontaneously around the life, visionary experience and charismatic personality of Samuel Bilehou Oschoffa (1909-1985), a Nigerian timber merchant who was born and nurtured in Porto-Novoo (now Benin Republic).

In 1947, Oschoffa claimed to have confronted his first traumatic experience in which he claimed God instructed him to found a church. This inaugural vision was the spark that ignited the nascence of the CCC. The nucleus of the Celestial Church of Christ emerged as a consequence of this at Porto Novoo and later spread to towns and villages in Dahomey (now Benin Republic) in the first instance. While the movement existed in Benin Republic since 1947, it was its inception in Nigeria three years later, in 1950 and onwards, that gave CCC its worldwide popularity and fame as witnessed today.

By the following decade of its presence in Nigeria, CCC from its first base in Makoko-Lagos, began to witness a phenomenal growth with its spread first to virtually all the Yoruba speaking areas and later to other parts of Nigeria. By 1975, the church had reckoned at least 150 parishes in Nigeria, as well as a steady influx of new members in Benin Republic. By the following year, the church recorded a total of 254 parishes, with 168 parishes in Nigeria alone and 86 parishes outside Nigeria. Thus, as the church was spreading gradually outside the Yoruba geo-ethnic context to other parts of Nigeria, parishes were being planted concurrently by both Yoruba and non-Yoruba speaking members in countries within the West African sub-region such as Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroun, Ghana, Senegal, and elsewhere such as in U.S.A, Canada and in several European countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands.